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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

U. S. De

Housekeepers' Chat Wednesday, Dec. 18, 1929

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Winter Sun Baths for Babies." Information from Children's Bureau, U. S. Dept. of Labor.

Bulletin available: "Infant Care."

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"What about sun baths for the baby in the winter time?" asks a young mother. "Isn't there great danger of making a child ill, by exposing him to cold?"

As an answer to this question, let me read you a paragraph or two from that most important book, called "Infant Care." This is from the chapter on "Outdoor Life":

"When the baby is two weeks, old, put him out of doors for a short time -- a half hour to an hour every day that the weather is pleasant--increasing the time gradually until he is staying out most of the day. Hardly anything will do more to insure a healthy babyhood, than outdoor life... In winter, if the temperature falls below 15 degrees Fahrenheit, the baby must not be outdoors unless he is in the sun. On sunny days, he may be put out for several hours, in the middle of the day, in a sunny corner of the porch or yard, protected from the wind. The temperature in such a protected sunny corner will be found to be 40 to 50 degrees higher than in the shade. If properly wrapped, even a very small baby can go out of doors, on every sunny day in winter."

Now, about sun baths. Do you know why sunlight is necessary for the proper growth of a baby? The growth of a child's bones depends not only on the food he eats, but also upon the direct sunlight he receives, for sunlight helps the body to use the food.

What happens, when a baby is deprived of direct sunlight, and of its substitute, cod-liver oil? You know what happens-- the child's bones do not develop normally; his muscles become flabby; his skin is pale. He will probably have rickets.

The beneficial effect of sunlight is not obtained unless the rays reach the skin directly. It is the ultra-violet rays of the sun which prevent and cure rickets. Ultra-violet rays cannot penetrate ordinary window glass, nor clothing; they can't do much for the baby who lies inside a closed window, nor for the bundled-up baby who is outside the window.

How soon can sun-baths be started? When the baby is about three or four weeks old; outdoor sunbaths for the spring and the summer baby; indoor sun-baths for the late fall and the winter baby.

I can imagine some fond mother saying: "What! Expose Johnny to the cold winter weather? Why, the poor little dear would freeze to death, so he would!"

Oh no, he wouldn't. We'll fix it so that little Johnny can have his ultra-violet rays, direct from the sun, even in the winter time. Of course, he may have to take his sun bath inside the house, in front of an open window.

In cold climates, real outdoor sun baths, exposing more than the face and hands, cannot be given between the first of November and the first of March. However, on bright winter days little Johnny can have a long outdoors sunning, in the middle of the day. Many mothers think that in cold weather a baby may not be put outdoors, not realizing that in the sun, the thermometer may register 40 to 50 degrees higher than in the shade.

During this season the ultra-violet rays are not so strong as in summer, therefore winter sunnings should be longer than summer ones. The baby's face and hands should be exposed to the direct rays of the sun. In the South, winter days are often warm enough to permit the arms and legs also to be exposed.

Babies born in the winter and fall should be given long indoor sun baths throughout the winter. In many localities, if a baby is used to indoor sun baths, he can be started on outdoor ones by the first of March, or even earlier, depending on the climate and the weather.

But let's get back to this indoor window sun bath. Open the window at top or at bottom. Place the baby in the patch of sunlight coming through the open space. If the room is heated, and the doors closed to prevent drafts, the baby need not be wrapped up. First, the face, hands, and arms and afterwards the legs can be exposed daily, for 15 to 20 minutes, and later for increasing periods, until the sun bath is given for one to two hours. It is thus possible to produce tanning. Tanning is evidence that the sun's rays are reaching the skin directly. If the sun is warm enough, even the baby's shirt may be taken off. The mother should sit beside the baby and watch him. If the sun goes behind a cloud, the baby must be covered. By holding her own hands in the sun, the mother can tell how warm it actually is.

A word about cod-liver oil, which is known as "bottled sunshine." In the Temperate Zones, especially in the fall and winter, the baby needs cod-liver oil with his sunlight. Even though a baby is born in the spring, and receives sun baths throughout his first summer, he should be given cod-liver oil. In winter he cannot get enough outdoor sunshine to prevent rickets, so he needs cod-liver oil especially at this season. It should be given to every baby throughout the first two years of life, beginning at two weeks of age, whether he is artificially fed or not. I shall not broadcast the amounts of cod-liver oil to give-- all that is in the book, "Infant Care."

The other day some one asked me whether "baby walkers" are harmful. They are. Baby walkers should never be used, nor should any other device that forces the baby to walk with his legs spread apart. A baby walker may overtire a child, because it holds him too long in a confined space, and forces him to take a more or less rigid position.

Don't teach the baby to walk until he is ready for it, and shows that he is. Too early walking may keep the natural bowing of a little baby's legs from straightening out, or may actually increase it. Do you know that at birth, a normal baby's legs are somewhat bowed? As he grows older, they straighten, unless he has rickets, or walks too soon.

There's another question which is often asked by modern parents. What kind of a baby carriage should they choose? For ordinary use, about the home, the carriage should be at least two feet from the ground. It should have room for the baby, with the necessary wrappings, either lying full length or sitting up. The carriage cover should be adjustable, to protect the baby from the wind. The carriage should have strong, well-balanced springs. It should stand squarely on four wheels. If it is to be used for outdoor naps, it should have a good full-length mattress that will lie flat. Don't use the carriage for sleeping, after the baby is too large to stretch out his full length in it.

Remember that a baby is more cramped in a carriage than in a bed; turn him once or twice during every nap. Cover the carriage with a net, to keep out flies or mosquitoes.

For the baby old enough to sit up, a safety strap that fastens about his waist, gives greater protection than the ordinary carriage strap. Provide a small mattress for the baby to sit on, so that his feet will be low, and hence more comfortable.

If you want to know more about babies, and how they should be brought up, please write for "Infant Care." It is free, and the best book I have ever read, on the care of babies.

Tomorrow have a good supply of pencils and paper, and we'll talk Christmas dinners.

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